

Power

A behaviorological view

Power - Definition

- Max Weber – German Sociologist
 - ***Power is the "...chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action."***

Conceptual Translation

- ***“...to realize their own will...”***
 - *The establishment of, or maintenance of already established, contingent relations that increase contact with reinforcers and/or provide more reinforcers*
- ***“...against the resistance of others...”***
 - *Through the ongoing and iterative delivery of punishment and/or reinforcement procedures*

Proposed behaviorological definition

*“Verbal rules, contingencies, reinforcers, stimuli and/or punishers that **differentially disseminate and distribute the contact with,** and/or the **sheer number** of primary and conditioned reinforcers among humans.”*

“...against the resistance of others...”

- This is “**generic**” behaviorology
- **All** behavior results from contingent relations
- At best, “**resistance**” manifests as counter-control
- Skinner addressed **the fundamentals** of this in Beyond freedom and dignity
- No one doubts the ability of contingent relations **to control behavior** (I hope!)

“...to realize their own will...”

- Emergence of socially-contingent relations
 - Evolutionary-selectionist process (as described by Glenn et al)
 - Presumably due strictly to ***physically-contingent***, NOT ***verbally-contingent***, relations
- However, there is substantial empirical evidence that **verbally-contingent relations DO** contribute to the emergence of extant contingencies.
- **All** extant verbal contingencies reflect power

Why “verbal?”

- Physical environment **does** exert control – does have power
- Humans, however, have to some degree “**mastered**” the physical environment so social contingencies are encountered much more frequently among many humans
- “...behavior reinforced ***through the mediation of others...***”
- Verbal ***IS*** social

Physical VS verbal

- Physical environment does not *behave*
- Physical environment is subject to physical contingencies (**physical laws**)
- The physical environment cannot “*learn*” – it cannot change contingencies due to a “*learning history*”
- This point is critical because humans **CAN** and **DO** change behavior and subsequent contingencies through learning

Humans change, so what?

- So, humans “**learn**” that behavior that conforms to established contingencies increases the likelihood of contact with reinforcers more so than other behavior (simple behaviorology)
- More importantly, however is learning that ***establishing*** (or *maintaining*) *certain contingencies not only produces more contact with reinforcers, but more reinforcers, too.*
- To paraphrase Mel Brooks, “It is good to be **the one that establishes the contingencies!**”

Control of contingencies is everything

- Those that have learned how to establish and/or use existing contingencies to produce more contact with, or simply more, reinforcers **get both**...and presumably that is reinforcing!
- Control through the use of contingencies then, **IS** power.
- What verbal contingencies, then do **NOT** have power? Any or none?

Examples

- “Because I said so!”
- Manifest destiny
- The divine right of kings
- “To earn an 'A' in this course, you must...”
- “Power comes from the barrel of a gun”
- “That is a boat. Can you say, 'boat?'”
- “Freedom isn't free” (general public notion)
- “That's just the way it is”
- “Poverty will always be with us”

Conclusion

- **All** verbally contingent relations are reflective of the concept of **power**
- Contingencies emerge and become established through **both** a physically-selective **AND** a verbally-selective process
- One(s) who **control(s) the contingencies** control(s) “the goodies”